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which he was a member.[1] In addition to this, recent changes in Hindu law, which apply to Coorgs also, have been such as to encourage individual acquisition at the expense of the *okka*.

The ancient custom of Coorgs recognized individual property only to a very limited extent, and that too only in movables. For instance, the younger members of an *okka* could cultivate, in the non-paddy season, and after they had contributed their daily quota of work to the joint estate, crops like ginger and turmeric. When these were sold a share was given to the *okka* for having provided the land on which they were grown.

The encouragement given to the ideas of partition and individual acquisition, the uprooting of Coorgs from their ancestral estates owing to the new political and economic structure stretching all over India, and the growing appeal of individualist ideas to the people, are all adversely affecting the solidarity of the *okka*. The elementary family, which was a weak entity in the traditional structure, is emerging with greater distinctness nowadays.

IX

In a sense, only men are full members of the *okka*, but such rights as women do possess in it are of paramount importance to them, and the granting of these rights in the bridegroom's *okka* is the crucial point in the marriage ritual. The granting of rights to the bride in the groom's *okka* is accompanied by the severance of her connexion with her natal *okka*. But such severance is not complete and irrevocable. The entire process is symbolized in the transference of twelve pebbles from the bride's natal *okka* to her conjugal *okka*.

After marriage, then, a girl is a member of her conjugal *okka*, and her membership does not become extinct even if she becomes a widow. She is entitled to stay in her conjugal home and to be maintained out of its income. She has also the right to be buried after death in its burial-ground.

The bride is given membership in the groom's *okka*, and not rights in the groom's share in the ancestral property of his *okka*. The entire idea of an individual having a share in the ancestral property of his *okka* is a comparatively recent introduction into Coorg law. Traditionally, the immovable property of an *okka*

[1] G. Richter, *Manual of Coorg*, p. 130.

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was both inalienable and impartible. But when partition did actually take place, it was done with the consent of all the members.

Nowadays, occasionally, a Coorg widow who is marrying her dead husband's younger brother is given rights anew in the *okka* of her new husband. This novel custom proceeds from the idea referred to above, that the bride is only given rights in her husband's share of his *okka's* property. It indicates, however, the growing importance of the elementary family among Coorgs.

When, however, the widow wants to marry someone who is not a member of her dead husband's *okka*, her connexion with the latter is first of all ritually broken. She then reverts to her natal *okka*, and at her new marriage her connexion with her natal *okka* is ritually severed, and rights are granted to her in her (new) husband's *okka*.

That is to say, a woman is compensated for the lack of the same quality of rights which a man has in his natal *okka* by the fact that she always enjoys a double membership: she never completely ceases to be a member of her natal *okka*, and at the same time she is a member of her husband's *okka*. She can go back to it under certain circumstances like widowhood or divorce.

Membership of the *okka* is extremely important, and lack of membership in some *okka* or other is tantamount to social extinction. Elders consequently try hard to see that the children of extra-marital alliances get berthed somewhere. It is right and proper that the father of the children should secure them membership of his *okka*, but if for some reason or other he cannot be persuaded to do so, the children are made members of their mother's *okka*.

X

The wife of the headman of the *okka* is the mistress of the household. She is called '*manépaṇikārti*' (house-work-woman). Ideally, all the women in the *okka* have to work under her guidance. The relationship between the various women in the joint family is frequently one of conflict. There is first of all the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, which is celebrated in Coorg and other South Indian folklore as one of conflict. In a society where the sexes are segregated even inside the household and where elders are very highly respected, the mother-in-law,

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at least in the first few years of marriage, is a much more important relative for a girl than even her husband. And this relationship is basically one of conflict. A girl is also in a relation of conflict with her husband's sisters, married as well as unmarried, and with her husband's brother's wives.

The conflicts between the women in the patrilocal *okka* strike at its solidarity. Elsewhere in south India where partition is easy, they lead to division of the joint family. But in Coorg where the *okka* is a very strong entity, and where partition is legally forbidden, they make the harmonious working of the *okka* extremely difficult.

Besides the conflicts mentioned above, certain lines of cleavage in the *okka* are obvious. The distinction between the sexes, which is present in the whole of the society, is also present in every unit of it. So is the distinction between members of different generations. Enormous emphasis is laid on seniority, and this is visible not only between members of different generations, but also between members of the same generation. The younger member has to behave deferentially towards the older.

Before the introduction, in however grudging a form, of the principle of partition, and of the new ideals associated with industrialization and Westernization, the elementary family was not a powerful unit. It obtained only a grudging recognition in ritual, which was quite consistent with its relative lack of emphasis in the total structure. A tendency of recent times is the strengthening of the elementary family at the expense of the *okka*. The elementary family is increasingly becoming the real residential, commensal, and economic group with certain ties with the *okka* from which it is emerging, or has just emerged.

The existence of these divisions inside the *okka* did not prevent it from acting as a unit in relation to other *okkas*. The *okka* was the basic unit of society, and certain offices like the headmanship of the village, *nāḍ*, and the local temple traditionally ran in certain *okkas*. Again, contribution to collective tasks was on the basis of the *okka*. For instance, each local high caste *okka* had to send at least one man and one woman for every Coorg wedding in the village. Similarly, it had to send representatives to the festival of the village-deity, and for repairing roads and building bridges. All the adult men in an *okka* were required to attend a collective dance or hunt.

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764 wife places on the spouse's head the mud vessel filled with water,
602 the coconut on the eldest son's head, and the spouted vessel full of water on the 'cross-nephew's' head. The family friend marks the forehead of each of these mourners with a few rice-grains yellowed with turmeric, and adjusts a ring of twisted grass on the ring-finger of the left hand. A mango leaf is put into the mud pot and another into the spouted vessel, while the eldest son is given a third leaf to carry in his hand. A hole is bored in both the mud pot and coconut to enable the liquid inside to trickle down to the ground from the head as the mourners march in state from the pond to the bier. The 'cross-nephew' has to carry the spouted vessel in such a way that a little water drips from it through the spout all the time.

The mourners go round the bier thrice, moving anti-clockwise, and at the end of the third round the spouse stands near the corpse's left shoulder, the son by the right shoulder, and the 'cross-nephew' near the feet. A little of the water in each of the three 'vessels' is poured into a dining-dish.

The three mourners then salute the corpse, after which they again go round the corpse thrice, moving anti-clockwise, sprinkling rice yellowed with turmeric as they go. After the final round is completed each takes up his original position by the corpse. The spouse touches the bier thrice with his (or her) pot and then smashes it to pieces by knocking it against the frame of the bier. As he (or she) does this, he utters the funeral cry, 'Thou art ruined . . . (husband, father, &c.)'.

The son follows next and he cuts the coconut into two halves after touching the bier thrice with it. He throws the halves underneath the bier and utters the funeral cry. The 'cross-nephew' who comes last repeats his predecessors' actions, at the end of which he throws the spouted vessel under the bier.

Shri K. J. Chenappa tells me that the pot represents the affinal bond which is destroyed at death, while the seed (coconut) is carried by the son who continues the *okka*, and the 'cross-nephew' carries the spouted vessel. He represents another *okka* which is linked to the dead person's by the fact that the dead person was a sibling of the 'cross-nephew's' parent.

• [594] Husband and wife constitute a legal, economic, ritual, and moral unity among Coorgs, and the sense of this unity is so great that the surviving spouse plays an even greater part in funeral rites than the eldest son, who represents the dead person's *okka*.

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The daughter looks upon her natal home as a haven of refuge in the first few years of married life. Her first confinement takes place in her natal home because it is considered proper for the girl to be with people with whom she can be at ease.

A proverb tells us that 'the mother's love for her daughter rendered her unfit to live with her husband, the sitting hen's love destroyed the egg'. An overfond mother tries to drag her married daughter away from her husband, and this might eventually break up the marriage.

The elementary family, which is a part of the *okka* or joint family, is weakly structured among Coorgs. This is because the *okka* is so strong that it does not permit the elementary families inside it to be strong units. There is no separate term for the elementary family.

The solidarity of the elementary family does not obtain expression in ritual. It is true that the affinal tie is very strongly emphasized in mourning, and the eldest son is a mourner of the first grade, and sometimes a younger son or daughter is also called upon to become a first-grade mourner. But usually the younger children of the dead person are not distinguished from the other younger members of the *okka*.

The fact that the elementary family is weakly structured among Coorgs does not mean that it has no solidarity; and in the last 120 years its solidarity has been increasing at the expense of the solidarity of the *okka* of which it is a part. Coorg ancestral houses are large, sprawling affairs, and the members of each elementary family within an *okka* occupy either a room, or a couple of rooms, or an entire wing. Sometimes they occupy one of two or three houses belonging to the *okka*. A member of the M-*okka* once told me, 'When this house was built over seventy years ago there were only two or three people in it. But our ancestors were so wise that they built a large house with a number of rooms so that all their descendants could live in it.' Now each of the married brothers and his children occupy a room or a couple of rooms inside it.

The unity of the elementary families within the *okka* appears in certain non-ritual contexts. For instance, parents take sides with their own children against the children of another member of the *okka* in the frequent quarrels of children. A proverb tells us that 'the *okka* went to ruin over the children's talk'. Quarrels arise when 'the children of the *okka* play together, and these children's quarrels

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lead to the elders having an argument, an argument which might later split the *okka*. Another proverb tells us that 'children's play leads to the *okka's* ruin'.

Marriage is very nearly universal among Coorgs, and bachelors and spinsters are very rare indeed. A man's social personality is fully developed only when he has married and become a father, and consequently a bachelor is regarded as one who is not fully developed.

It is believed that a bachelor dies with many unsatisfied desires in his heart. While a gold coin is placed in the mouth of the corpse of a married man, a bitter fruit is kept in the mouth of a bachelor's corpse. A bachelor's ghost is regarded as mischievous, and the ghost of a bachelor-warrior as even more mischievous.

During the periodical ancestor-propitiations in a Coorg *okka*, songs are sung recounting the deeds of each ancestor. The name of a bachelor-ancestor is omitted from such a song unless he had proved an exceptional success in life, or had died while fighting in battle. Such exceptional qualifications are not, however, required from a married ancestor. A bachelor's personality is normally incomplete, and only the achievement of exceptional social importance can outweigh this fact.

Sanskritic Hinduism prescribes marriage for every adult. And only a married man may perform certain important rites.[1] A man and his wife constitute a single spiritual entity, and a wife shares in the spiritual merit acquired by her husband. Sanskritic Hinduism also enjoins on the wife the duty of effacing herself completely for her husband.

The strength of the husband–wife bond and the subservience of the wife to the husband express themselves in ritual. When a Coorg couple bathe in the source of the river Kāvēri during the Kāvēri Festival, the ends of their garments are tied together: Hindus in every part of India observe this custom when they are bathing in a sacred river or tank.

Until recent years a Coorg bride and groom never sat together for the performance of *mūrta*. *Mūrta* was performed separately for the groom and bride in their respective houses on the first day of

[1] A Brahmin friend of mine married soon after the lapse of the required period of a year after the death of his father because the performance of certain rites like the periodical offerings to dead ancestors and the worship of the deities traditionally worshipped by his family required him to be married. He was the eldest son of his father.